GENDER IN MYSTICAL AND OCCULT THOUGHT

Behmenism and its development in England

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Introduction

Since the arrival of the 'second wave' of feminism in the 1960s, several writers have re-examined the role of women in religion and the gender identity of God.[1] The new feminism was itself part of a broader cultural phenomenon in which other, partly complementary and partly contradictory, trends were occurring. One such trend was the so-called 'sexual revolution', to which the new feminists have an ambivalent attitude.[2] Another trend was the emergence of New Age spirituality, involving a broad religious eclecticism, ranging from Eastern religions to neo-paganism and the Western occult tradition. Inevitably, the meeting of the New Age and the new feminism produced a crop of books devoted to the cult of the goddess.[3]

Like feminist scholarship in general, much feminist theology has been concerned with seeking roots and precedents.[4] This book is devoted to the followers of a man who, in some ways, seems to be a precursor of the cultural trends of the last three decades, Jacob Boehme. Behmenism, as the English have traditionally called Boehme's theosophy, is itself a system of beliefs involving a revaluation of divine gender. If the emphasis of early Behmenists on chastity is incompatible with the 'sexual revolution', it might at least claim some affinity with radical and separatist feminism. The later validation of sexuality among some Behmenists

[1] See, for example, Paul K. Jewitt, *Man as male and female. A study of sexual relationships from a theological point of view* (Grand Rapids, 1976); Susanne Heine, *Christianity and the goddess. Systematic criticism of a feminist theology*, trans. John Bowden (London, 1988); Paul Avis, *Eros and the sacred* (London, 1989).

[2] For a good overview of the complexities of feminist thought on sexuality, see Anne Snitow, Christine Stansall and Sharon Thompson (eds.), *Desire. The politics of sexuality* (London, 1983).

[3] See, for example, Pamela Berger, *The goddess obscured. Transformation of the grain protectress from goddess to saint* (London, 1988); Shirley Nicholson (ed.), *The goddess re-awakening. The feminine principle today* (Wheaton, IL, 1989); Caitlín Matthews, *Sophia, goddess of wisdom. The divine feminine from black goddess to world soul* (London, 1991). Edward C. Whitmont's *Return of the goddess* (London, 1983) belongs to a different, Jungian and non-feminist, category.

[4] Historical contributions include Rosemary Radford Ruether (ed.), *Religion and sexism. Images of women in the Jewish and Christian traditions* (New York; 1974); Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (eds.), *Women of spirit. Female leadership in the Jewish and Christian traditions* (New York, 1979); Joyce L. Irwin (ed.), *Womanhood in radical Protestantism, 1525–1675* (New York, 1979). Irwin's book is a useful anthology of primary sources.

bears a superficial resemblance to the sexual mysticism sometimes found in New Age spirituality. Behmenism is in fact rooted in the occult tradition which has influenced this spirituality. Apart from these considerations, a study of Behmenism offers the opportunity to investigate the complex relationship between religion, gender and sexuality in the emergence of modern society.

Jacob Boehme is relatively little known in twentieth-century Britain, perhaps partly because of the difficulty of his style. It is easy for the unprepared student to sympathise with Lichtenberg's remark that Boehme's works were 'a kind of picnic, in which the author provides the words and the reader the sense'.[5] The obscurity and apparent eccentricities of his style might also give the impression that he was a purely idiosyncratic figure. This style, however, is merely an example of what C.G. Jung called the 'impetuous language' of the occult,[6] and Boehme was very much a part of a group of interrelated traditions whose vitality in early modern culture has been rediscovered by students of science, art and literature. Frances Yates has argued that modern science is deeply rooted in the Hermetic tradition.[7] If there is some doubt about Yates's theory,[8] there can be no dispute that occult thought exerted an important cultural influence in the early modern period and beyond. Fred Gettings has demonstrated that major artists into our own century have worked against a background of occult philosophy and symbolism.[9] Several studies have shown the pervasive presence of esoteric thought in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature.[10] The indebtedness of French Romantic writers to occult traditions has been established by Auguste Viatte.[11] Although there is need for further research on the esoteric sources of English Romanticism, writers like Desirée Hirst and Ernest Tuveson have demonstrated that the debt was substantial.[12] The Romantics' attitude to

[5] Cited in Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*, in *The complete psychological works*, vol. VIII (London, 1962), p. 86.

[6] Carl G. Jung, 'Paracelsus', in Carl G. Jung, *The spirit in man, art and literature* (London, 1966), pp. 3–12, p. 8.

[7] Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic tradition* (London, 1964). See also Allen G. Debus, *Man and nature in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1978) and Charles Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton. Magic and the making of modern science* (Cambridge, 1982).

[8] See, for example, Brian Vickars (ed.), *Occult and scientific mentalities in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1984). For a brief but balanced survey of the subject, see John Hedley Brooke, *Science and religion. Some historical perspectives* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 63 ff.

[9] Fred Gettings, *The hidden art. A study of occult symbolism in art* (London, 1978).

[10] Charles Nicholl, *The chemical theatre* (London, 1980); Douglas Brooks-Davies, *The mercurian monarch. Magical politics from Spenser to Pope* (Manchester, 1983); John S. Mebane, *Renaissance magic and the return of the Golden Age. The occult tradition in Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare* (Lincoln, NE, 1989).

[11] Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du romantisme*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1928).

[12] Desirée Hirst, *Hidden riches. Traditional symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London, 1964); Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The avatars of thrice-great Hermes. An approach to Romanticism* (Lewisberg, 1984).

nature, for example, was deeply rooted in occult spirituality. This book will seek to show that the origins of that other great idol of the Romantics, Woman, are to be found partly in occult thought, more specifically in Behmenism.

To judge by the extent of his influence, Jacob Boehme was one of the outstanding figures of early modern culture. The impact of his ideas can be found throughout the pietistic movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[13] Heine observed that Boehme's name was a 'shibboleth' to the Romantics, regarding this as one of their 'madnesses'.[14] Hegel praised Boehme as 'the first German philosopher' and Leibniz, Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer were all among his admirers.[15] Nor was Lewis White Beck correct when, commenting on what he saw as Boehme's incomprehensible influence, he asserted that 'existentialists looking for venerable ancestors have not yet rediscovered him'.[16] Paul Tillich cited him as a source of existentialism in 1942, and it has been suggested that Heidegger's philosophy of language may owe something to Boehme.[17]

Boehme also played a role in English literature. The poet Henry Vaughan and his brother Thomas were both interested in his ideas.[18] It has been argued that Boehme influenced what might be called the proto-Romantic elements of Milton's poetry,[19] and his impact on William Blake is well established.[20] To historians of the seventeenth century, however, Boehme is best known in association with the Interregnum radicals. Since this association is somewhat misleading with regard to the nature of English Behmenism, a brief introduction to the man and the movement is necessary.

[13] F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German pietism during the eighteenth century* (Leiden, 1973).

[14] Heinrich Heine, *Die romantische Schule* (1833), ed. Helga Weidmann (Stuttgart, 1979), p. 86.

[15] G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in Hegel's *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main, 1971), vol. XX, p. 94; Ernest Benz, *The mystical sources of German Romantic philosophy*, trans. Blair R. Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul (Allison Park, PA, 1983); Robert F. Brown, *The later philosophy of Schelling. The influence of Boehme on the works of 1809–1815* (Lewisberg, 1977).

[16] Lewis White Beck, *Early German philosophy. Kant and his predecessors* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), p. 156.

[17] Paul Tillich, 'Existential philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12, 5 (1942), pp. 44–70, p. 58; Peter Malekin, 'Introduction' to his edition of Jacob Boehme, *The key and other writings* (Durham, 1988), pp. 1–35, p. 10.

[18] Elizabeth Holmes, *Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic philosophy*, 2nd edn (New York, 1967).

[19] Margaret Lewis Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme. A study of German mysticism in seventeenth-century England* (New York, 1914).

[20] Jacques Roos, *Les aspects littéraires du mysticisme philosophique et l'influence de Boehme et de Swedenborg au début du romantisme. William Blake, Novalis, Balanche* (Strasburg, 1953); Gerald E. Bentley, Jr, 'William Blake and the alchemical philosophers', BLitt dissertation, University of Oxford, 1954; Bryan Aubrey, 'The influence of Jacob Boehme on the works of William Blake', PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1981.

Jacob Boehme was born in 1575 at Alt-Seidenberg, Upper Lusatia.[21] The son of prosperous peasants, Boehme received some elementary education before being apprenticed to a shoemaker. Becoming a master of his craft in Görlitz in 1599, he married the daughter of a local butcher. This was a decisive period in Boehme's life, bringing him not only independence and marriage, but also a religious conversion under the influence of the Lutheran Primarius (head pastor) of Görlitz, Martin Moller. Then, in 1600, he had his first mystical experience, a vision which he believed granted him insight into the nature of the world and its relation to God.

In the following years, Boehme began to compose a personal memoir of his ideas, *The aurora*.[22] The nearly completed manuscript (it was never to be finished) fell into the hands of a local nobleman, Carl von Ender. Von Ender had the work copied and circulated it, without Boehme's knowledge or consent. It soon came to the attention of Moller's successor as Primarius of Görlitz, Gregory Richter, who readily detected heresy in the cobbler's obscure writings. Protesting his orthodoxy, Boehme was called before the town council in July 1613 and was admonished to stop writing. Perhaps this had some influence on his decision that year to sell his shoemaking business and take to merchandising woollen goods in Silesia and neighbouring Bohemia. The man known in Behmenist hagiography as the 'cobbler of Görlitz' was also an international cloth merchant.

Boehme obeyed the injunction to stop writing until 1619, when he began to produce a series of works which were to establish his lasting fame. These were circulated privately in manuscript until one of Boehme's noble friends, Hans von Schweinichen, printed two of his tracts as *The way to Christ* in 1623,[23] again without Boehme's knowledge or consent. This event precipitated a renewed conflict with Richter. Boehme was called before the town council for a second time in March 1624, and in May he was summoned to the Elector's court at Dresden. While in Dresden he lodged with the Elector's personal physician, Benedict Hinkelmann. The theosopher's reception in Dresden seems to have been sympathetic, but this fortunate outcome was soon overshadowed. On his way home Boehme fell ill of an abdominal complaint; carried back to Görlitz, he died there on 17 November 1624.

[21] The main source for Boehme's biography is Abraham von Frankenberg's 'Gründlicher und wahrhafter Bericht', translated by Francis Okeley as *Memoirs of the life, death, burial and wonderful writings of Jacob Behmen* (Northampton, 1780). The hagiographical bias of this work was first corrected by Adolph Flechner, 'Sketch of the life of Jacob Böhme', reprinted by John Rolleston Earle in his edition of Jacob Boehme, *De electione gratiae and Quaestiones theosophicae* (London, 1930). The standard modern biography is Will-Erich Peuckert, *Das Leben Jacob Boehmes*, in vol. X of his facsimile reprint of *Theosophia revelata. Oder aller gottlicher Schriften Jacob Böhmens*, 11 vols. (Stuttgart, 1955–61).

[22] Jacob Boehme, *The aurora, that is, the day-spring*, trans. John Sparrow (London, 1656).

[23] Jacob Boehme, *The way to Christ discovered* (London, 1648).

It can be seen that Boehme was an unlikely representative of counter-cultural radicalism. Although Richter was undoubtedly correct in detecting heterodox elements in his thought, Boehme himself always insisted on his complete Lutheran orthodoxy. His only works published in his lifetime appeared without his knowledge or consent; he was not impelled by an evangelical mission. The 'cobbler of Görlitz' was not a 'masterless man', but a relatively prosperous cloth merchant. His friends were even more exalted: members of the petty nobility and the urban elite. We have already met von Ender, von Schweinichen and Hinkelmann; we might add to the list of Boehme's noble followers the names of Abraham von Sommerfield, Abraham von Frankenberg, Rudolph von Gersdorff and Friedrich von Kregwitz. Among Boehme's bourgeois friends were Balthasar Walther, the Glogau physician who was to become director of the Elector's chemical laboratory in Dresden; the Görlitz physician, Tobias Kober; Christian Bernhard, customs-collector at Sagen; and the Beuthen toll-gatherer, Caspar Lindner.[24]

Boehme had defended the Lord's Supper and baptism at length, and his friend Kober witnessed that he was 'a constant Frequenter . . . of the *Holy Sacraments* whenever administered'.[25] In this he was typical of Renaissance mysticism which, as Kees Bolle has observed, was marked by a respect for liturgical propriety.[26] This was also a characteristic shared by much early modern English spirituality. John Everard, whom Christopher Hill regards as a 'perpetual heretic', asserted that Christ 'submitted himself to all outward Ordinances, because he knew that all power was ordained of God; and so far forth as they tend to God, and tend to love and peace, we ought to submit'.[27] Even the Ranter, Abiezer Coppe, conceded that 'God can speak, & gloriously preach to some through Carols, Anthems, Organs'.[28] One English Behmenist, Roger Crab, did not share this tolerant attitude to the externals of religion. Crab condemned the parish church as a 'Spiritual Bawdy-House' whose ministers were 'Pimps' and 'Ponders' [*sic*] of the Great Whore.[29] With the exception of Crab, however, the English Behmenists appear to have been unanimous in their acceptance of sacramental religion. This does not mean that they can be regarded as formalist in their religious orientation. Rather, they preferred to steer a middle course between outward ceremonies and inner spirituality. Edward Hooker lamented

[24] Flechner, 'Sketch of the life of Jacob Böhme', pp. xl ff.

[25] Jacob Boehme, *Of Christs testaments*, trans. John Sparrow (London, 1652); Frankenberg, *Memoirs*, p. 64.

[26] Kees Bolle, 'Structures of Renaissance mysticism', in Robert S. Kinsman (ed.), *The darker vision of the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 119–45, pp. 123 ff.

[27] Christopher Hill, *The world turned upside down. Radical ideas during the English revolution*, paperback edn (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 185; John Everard, *Some gospel-treasures opened* (London, 1653), p. 63.

[28] Abiezer Coppe, *Some sweet sips, of some spirituall wine* (1649), in Nigel Smith (ed.), *A collection of Ranter writings from the 17th century* (London, 1983), pp. 47–72, p. 60.

[29] Roger Crab, *Dagons-downfall; or, the great idol digged up root and branch* (London, 1657), p. 3.

that Christianity was being 'crucified, as it were, twixt Ritualitie and Scrupulositie'.[30] The Dublin Behmenist, Edward Taylor, was 'in the Communion of the Church of England', but abhorred 'a bare outside Formality'.[31] In contrast to the Quakers, members of the Behmenist Philadelphian Society saw no contradiction between 'the *Internal Principle of a Light within*' and sacramental religion. On the contrary, the whole purpose of baptism was 'the Infusion of an Internal Permanent *Light*, *Life*, or *Spirit*', and Holy Communion was 'grounded upon the Sustentation and Augmentation' of this light.[32]

These examples suggest the central characteristic of the Behmenists' attitude to the externals of religion: acceptance without insistence. William Law, whose personal piety tended to be High Church, nevertheless minimised the necessity of observing forms. Even before becoming a Behmenist Law advocated a *via media* in which godliness took precedence over mere conformity, remarking that 'there is not one command in all the Gospel for *Public Worship*; and perhaps it is a duty that is least insisted upon in Scripture of any other . . . Whereas that *Religion* or *Devotion* which is to govern the *ordinary actions* of our life is to be found in almost every verse of Scripture.'[33] As with the German pietists, an emphasis on godliness and the indwelling spirit helped the Behmenists to transcend their own confessional loyalties.[34] Unlike the Quakers, the Behmenists' attitude can be described as an ecumenical supraformalism rather than a separatist antiformalism.

This ecumenicalism was the most insistent and the most persistent theme in Behmenist writings. John Sparrow, Boehme's principal English translator, was motivated by a desire to find an antidote to the 'Sectarian Babel' he saw around him.[35] His cousin and collaborator, John Ellistone, expected Behmenism to 'settle all sects, and Controversies in Religion'.[36] The leading English Behmenist, John Pordage, declared that he 'could not express the title of Saints to any one Sect or Society of men, but apply it to all that are called, chosen, and faithful, who shew their interest in Christs death and resurrection'.[37] His son, Samuel

[30] E[dward] H[ooker], 'The praefatori epistl[e]' to John Pordage, *Theologia mystica, or, the mystic divinitie of the aeternal invisibles* (London, 1683), p. 51.

[31] 'The publisher's preface to the reader', in Edward Taylor, *Jacob Behmen's theosophick philosophy unfolded* (London, 1691), sigs. a2^{r}, b3^{r}.

[32] *The state of the Philadelphian Society. Or, the grounds of their proceedings consider'd* (London, 1697), pp. 15 ff.

[33] William Law, *A serious call to a devout and holy life* (1729), in *The works of the reverend William Law*, ed. G. Moreton, 9 vols. (vols. I–V: Brockenhurst, vols VI–IX: Canterbury, 1892–3); vol. IV, p. 10.

[34] F. Ernst Stoeffler, *The rise of evangelical pietism* (Leiden, 1965), pp. 8–9.

[35] John Sparrow, preface to Jacob Boehme, *Mercurius Teutonicus, or a Christian information concerning the last times* (London, 1649), sig. A2^{v}.

[36] John Ellistone, preface to *The epistles of Jacob Behmen aliter teutonicus philosophus* (London, 1649), sig. A3^{r}.

[37] John Pordage, *Innocencie appearing through the dark mists of pretended guilt* (London, 1655), sig. A2^{r}.

Pordage, sought to address 'those who cordially desire Heaven and happiness, in what sect, form, or condition soever'.[38] Since 'there may be great variety in God's works upon Souls', Thomas Bromley thought 'that none are to be confined to one exact path'.[39]

Ecumenicalism was one of the fundamental principles of the Philadelphian Society. Francis Lee told Henry Dodwell that 'The society whereof I profess myself a member are not of one ecclesiastical communion'; apart from Anglicans, it comprised Lutherans, Catholics and even Calvinists.[40] The Philadelphians did not attempt to persuade 'others to *Dissent* from that Communion, which they are previously oblig'd to adhere to'.[41] In part, this was simply the result of the way in which an emphasis on inner spirituality tended to convert all external matters into adiaphora. Richard Roach observed that:

> Mysticks in all Parts & of all Denominations . . . have Overlook[e]d and shot beyond y^e^ Particularities of their own Church or Party as in an Outward Visible Form, & kept to y^e^ Interior or Spiritual Way; in w^ch^ there may be Observ[e]d as Great a Harmony & Unity even among those of Externally Different Denominations, as there is among those in the Outward Way & Forms a Disunity & Disharmony.[42]

Behmenist ecumenicalism was also a recognition that no existing communion could claim perfection. The Philadelphians were 'deeply sensible of Great Corruptions in most, or all, of the Christian Bodies, or Communities, from the *Apostolical* Rule'.[43] The Moravian Behmenist, Francis Okeley, thought that 'the time is not yet come, when any *particular* Denomination can, with Truth, claim the *exclusive* Privilege of being *the only infallible* CHURCH OF CHRIST'.[44]

Charles Webster has asserted that interest in Boehme's works was felt largely by Puritans and separatists.[45] This was far from being exclusively the case. It was, after all, no less a person than Charles I who described Boehme's *XL Questions* as 'one of the best inventions that I ever read'.[46] As Michael Hunter has pointed out, there were close parallels between the Hermetic and heraldic views of the universe, and recent research has shown that the ideological orientation of occult spirituality was complex, ranging from moderate Anglicanism

[38] S[amuel] P[ordage], *Mundorum explicatio. Or, the explanation of an hieroglyphical figure* (London, 1661), p. 95, note.

[39] Thomas Bromley, *The way to the Sabbath of rest. Or the soul's progresse in the work of regeneration* (London, 1650), sig. A2^r^.

[40] Francis Lee, letter to Henry Dodwell, in Christopher Walton (ed.), *Notes and materials for an adequate biography of the celebrated divine and theosopher, William Law* (London, 1854), pp. 194–221, p. 217.

[41] *The state of the Philadelphian Society*, p. 7.

[42] Richard Roach, 'An Acc^t^ of y^e^ Rise & Progress of the Philadelphian Society', MS Rawlinson, D833, fos. 63–5, fo. 63^v^.

[43] *The state of the Philadelphian Society*, p. 7.

[44] Francis Okeley, 'The Translator's Preface' to Frankenberg, *Memoirs*, p. viii.

[45] Charles Webster, *The great instauration. Science, medicine and reform, 1626–1660* (London, 1975), p. 498.

[46] Bailey, *Milton and Jakob Boehme*, p. 60.

to radical Puritanism.[47] Elias Ashmole, John Pordage's patron at Bradfield, and an important publisher of alchemical texts, was a royalist. Pordage's connection with Ashmole does not, of course, establish anything about his own politics. There is no evidence of a close relationship between the two men, and Ashmole acquired control of the rectory at Bradfield when Pordage was already the incumbent.[48] There was, moreover, nothing to prevent royalists and parliamentarians from forming close friendships, as was the case with Ashmole and the astrologer, William Lilly.[49] Nevertheless, the complexity of the social and political dimension of occult thought, and the Behmenists' sacramental and anti-sectarian approach to religion, invite a consideration of the way in which Boehme's followers relate to the English radical tradition.

It is difficult to place the Interregnum Behmenists in a single category. Insofar as they adopted a political stance they seem to have been broadly parliamentarian in sympathy, and I can find no evidence to support Hutin's assertion that John Pordage was always a royalist.[50] When Charles Hotham fell foul of the Committee for the Reformation of the Universities in 1651, a number of character witnesses testified that he showed 'strictness in religion' and had 'zealously prosecuted the Parliament Cause'.[51] John Sparrow had been a colonel in the Eastern Association and was a member of the Hale Commission on law reform.[52] It is in this capacity that he seemed most radical. He shared the common view that laws should be 'briefe, plaine, & easie', and wanted to abolish the death penalty for murderers, substituting exile to 'some remote uninhabited Countrey'.[53] There appears to be little doubt as to Roger Crab's radicalism. He had been an Agitator in the Army and was sentenced to 'death in the field' for some unspecified offence.[54] Reprieved, he survived to pursue his career as the self-proclaimed 'English hermit'. Crab thought that '*To love God above all and to love thy neighbour as thyself* is impossible for any man to do

[47] Michael Hunter, *Elias Ashmole, 1617–1692. The founder of the Ashmolean Museum and his world* (Oxford, 1983), p. 12; Robert M. Schuler, 'Some spiritual alchemies of seventeenth-century England', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 41 (1980), pp. 293–318; J. Andrew Mendelsohn, 'Alchemy and politics in England, 1649–1665', *Past and Present*, 135 (1992), pp. 30–78.

[48] C.H. Josten, 'Introduction' to *Elias Ashmole (1617–1692). His autobiographical and historical notes, his correspondence, and other contemporary sources relating to his life and work*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1966), vol. I, p. 109.

[49] William Lilly, *The last of the astrologers. Mr. William Lilly's history of his life and times from the year 1602 to 1681*, ed. Katherine M. Briggs (London, 1974).

[50] Serge Hutin, *Les disciples anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1960), p. 88.

[51] Charles Hotham, *A true state of the case of Mr. Hotham, late Fellow of Peter-house* (London, 1651), p. 14.

[52] Donald Veall, *The popular movement for law reform, 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 80–1.

[53] John Sparrow, preface to Jacob Boehme, *The second book. Concerning the three Principles of the divine essence of the eternall dark, light, and temporary world*, trans. John Sparrow (London, 1648), sig. A4^v. Henceforth referred to as *Three principles*.

[54] Roger Crab, *The English hermite, or, wonder of this age* (London, 1655), p. 4.

whilest he encroacheth to himself more Land, or finer Houses, or better clothing or dyet than his neighbours'.[55] Crab's publisher, however, assured his readers that 'he approves of Civill Magistracy, and is neither of the *Levellers*, nor *Quakers*, nor *Shakers*, nor *Ranters*, but above Ordinances'.[56] Perhaps it would be safer to interpret Crab's attack on riches in the context of mystical asceticism rather than of premature socialism.

John Pordage certainly had radical associates, including William Everard and John Tany. At his ejection proceedings in 1654, however, he defended himself from the imputation of guilt by association. He had merely employed Everard for a few weeks to help with the harvest and, as for Tany, 'as I invite none, so I turn away none that come to visit me, though their principles in matters of Doctrine, Worship, and Discipline be different from mine'.[57] Richard Baxter accused the Behmenists of believing that we should 'lay by all offices in the Common-wealth', and that 'all things should be common'.[58] Baxter also tells us that 'the chief Person' of Pordage's 'Family Communion', Thomas Bromley (who appears to be his only source), was 'much against Propriety, and against Relations of Magistrates, Subjects, Husbands, Wives, Masters, Servants, &c.'[59] It would not be surprising to find Christian anarchism and communism in a perfectionist movement. With the exception of a marked preference for celibacy, however, there is nothing in the writings of Pordage's circle to corroborate Baxter's allegations. Again, it is perhaps safest to interpret this evidence in terms of asceticism and quietism than as an indication of social radicalism.

If Baxter was correct about the radicalism of the Interregnum Behmenists, the movement certainly retreated into conservatism after the Restoration. William Blake notwithstanding, there is no justification for the view that the Behmenists were part of an unbroken tradition of radicalism stretching into the eighteenth century.[60] Many Behmenists believed in the divine right of kings. Edward Hooker asserted that it was not the prerogative of God's children '*to change* Kingdoms and Governments . . . It is *Jehovah Aelohim* the most *high God*, who reigneth in the Kingdoms of men, and who *solely* is *Hee who* giveth these to whom soever he pleaseth.'[61] The Philadelphians declared that 'The Civil Government is an Ordinance of God, as he is Supream Governor of the World,

[55] Crab, *Dagons-downfall*, p. 6.
[56] 'The Publisher to the Reader', in Crab, *The English hermite*, [sig. A2^{v}].
[57] Pordage, *Innocencie appearing*, p. 12.
[58] Richard Baxter, *For prevention of the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost* (London, 1655), pp. 155–6.
[59] Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. Matthew Sylvester (London, 1696), part 1, p. 74.
[60] See, for example, Jonathan Bate's review of E.P. Thompson, *Witness against the Beast. William Blake and the moral law* (Cambridge, 1993), in *The Guardian*, 9 November 1993, review section, p. 10. My own reading of Thompson's book differs from Bate's.
[61] H[ooker], 'The praefatori epistl[e]', p. 87.

and is accordingly to be submitted to.'[62] One of their criteria for evaluating the authenticity of divine inspiration was that 'No Private Spirit of Revelation is to oppose it self to a Publick Constitution; though it be not of Immediate Divine Appointment.'[63] In accordance with these principles many Behmenists were Nonjuring and Jacobite in sympathy: Francis Lee, George Cheyne, John Byrom and William Law are all examples. Similarly, the members of the allied Scottish Bourignonist movement were 'all of the Episcopal party' and 'mostly Jacobites'.[64]

Not all Behmenists were inflexible advocates of divine right. During the Commonwealth Philip Herbert, fifth Earl of Pembroke and one of Pordage's followers, had served briefly as president of the Council of State.[65] Samuel Pordage had welcomed the Restoration, but was to support the Whigs in the Exclusion crisis.[66] Richard Roach was Hanoverian in sympathy, writing three poems in praise of the new royal house.[67] Henry Brooke rejected divine right, passive obedience and arbitrary authority, recommending a balance of the three estates (king, aristocracy and commons).[68] He was also to write anti-Jacobite propaganda in the wake of the 1745 rebellion.[69] None of this, however, can be meaningfully construed as political radicalism.

There is some evidence of the existence of a popular Behmenism, but (except insofar as the American Shakers fall into this category) it is insufficient to warrant any conclusions as to its character. In eighteenth-century Dartmouth there was a group 'of the illiterate and simple sort' who were attracted to Boehme's ideas, and the six men expelled by Wesley from the Methodist society for 'reading Jacob Behmen and Mr. Law' were presumably plebeian.[70] There are in fact many passages in Boehme's writings which display an apparently radical class-consciousness: 'Those that are in Authority and power suck the very Marrow from the Bones of Men of low Degree and Rank, and feed upon the sweat of their Browes.'[71] An uncritical reading of such sentiments occasionally

[62] Anonymous, *Propositions extracted from the reasons for the foundation and promotion of a Philadelphian Society* (London, 1697), p. 10.

[63] *The state of the Philadelphian Society*, p. 24.

[64] G.H. Henderson, *Religious life in seventeenth-century Scotland* (Cambridge, 1931), p. 229.

[65] Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians. A contribution to the study of English mysticism in the 17th and 18th centuries* (Uppsala, 1948), p. 52.

[66] Samuel Pordage, *Heroick stanzas on his Majesties coronation* (London, 1661) and *Azaria and Hushai. A poem* (London, 1682).

[67] MS Rawlinson D832, fos. 239–40, 246, 263–4.

[68] Henry Brooke, *The fool of quality; or, the history of Henry Earl of Moreland*, 2nd edn, 5 vols. (London, 1777), vol. III, pp. 205 ff.

[69] Henry Brooke, *The farmer's letters to the Protestants of Ireland* (Dublin, 1745).

[70] 'Ralph Mather's account of spiritual persons, to Henry Brooke', in Walton (ed.), *Notes and materials*, pp. 595–6; John Byrom, *Selections from the journals and papers of John Byrom, poet-diariest-shorthand writer, 1691–1763*, ed. Henri Talon (London, 1950), p. 282.

[71] Jacob Boehme, *The aurora*, 4:6. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Boehme's works are to the chapter and paragraph numbers of the Sparrow–Ellistone translations, which differ slightly from the German original.

finds its way into the taxonomy of radicalism.[72] Passages like these, however, did not prevent Boehme from enjoying the patronage of men in authority and power, a fact which in itself should alert us to the complexity of the position. We might compare Boehme's words with Johann Reuchlin's assertion that the Messiah 'will not only ignore the silly and mean absurdities of the time – public office, honor, government – as being empty and stupid, he will actually hold them in contempt'.[73] No one has ever suggested that Reuchlin was a radical, and this passage occurs in a work with a grossly obsequious dedication to Pope Leo X.

Insofar as it is visible, English Behmenism was a movement of the professional middle class. John Pordage and Richard Roach were clerics. Pordage was also a physician, as were Francis Lee and George Cheyne, the latter having fashionable practices in Bath and London. Samuel Pordage, Henry Brooke and William Law were all men of letters. In addition, Samuel Pordage held a post in the Duke of Buckingham's household, Brooke was a lawyer and Law (like Charles Hotham before him) had pursued an academic career until abandoning it because of his Nonjuring principles. Being middle-class, of course, is not incompatible with having popular sympathies, but such sentiments are not readily apparent in Edward Hooker's contemptuous description of 'the mobile (*that monstrous Head, or mani headed Monster of Confusion*) I mean the mani, the multitude, the vulgar, the Populo (*what shall I name them? the common Peopl[e]*'.[74] This does not mean that the Behmenists were uncaring. They emphasised the duty of realising divine love in their relations with others. Unlike many of his contemporaries, William Law believed that charity should be unconditional, refusing to make a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor: 'where has the Scripture made *merit* the rule of charity?'[75] His neighbours at King's Cliffe petitioned the local justice because his indiscriminate alms-giving encouraged paupers to flock to the parish.[76] If the Behmenists were radicals, theirs was a radicalism of compassion rather than subversion, based not on a desire to level, but on the urge to fulful God's command to love our neighbour.

In this the Behmenists seem to have been the authentic heirs of the Familist tradition. Both Familism and Behmenism were forms of occult spirituality. John Everard, who was accused of Familism and who certainly shared many of the Familists' views, was the English translator of the source texts of Hermeticism.[77] The English Familist bookseller, Thomas Basson, and his son

[72] See, for example, Christopher Hill's use of a similar trope of John Everard's, *The world turned upside down*, p. 185.

[73] Johann Reuchlin, *On the art of the Kabbalah. De arte cabalistica* trans. Martin and Sarah Goodman, paperback edn (Lincoln, NE, 1993), p. 107.

[74] H[ooker], 'The praefatori epistl[e]', p. 45.

[75] Law, *A serious call*, p. 68.

[76] A. Keith Walker, *William Law. His life and thought* (London, 1973), p. 170.

[77] Hermes Trismegistus, *The divine Pymander of Hermes Trismegistus*, trans. John Everard (London, 1650); T. Wilson Hayes, 'John Everard and the Familist tradition', in Margaret Jacob and James Jacob (eds.), *The origins of Anglo-American radicalism* (London, 1984), pp. 60–9.

Govert, who lived in Leiden in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, specialised in the sale of both Familist and occult works. Govert also published Arminian texts, and both Familism and Behmenism, like occult spirituality in general, tended to be Arminian in outlook. The Bassons were booksellers to the University of Leiden, where several Familists held academic posts in the late sixteenth century: the historian, Hadrianus Junius; the lawyer, Dirck van Egmond vander Nyenberg; and the professor of medicine, Johannes Heurnius.[78] It is possible that Leiden was still a centre of Familist and occult interests when John Pordage studied medicine there in the early 1640s.[79] By 1645 Pordage himself was being accused of Familism, in connection with Giles Randall and John Everard.[80] Six years later, Pordage was cited as an example of the 'double tongues' with which Familists spoke, and in 1655 Christopher Fowler accused him of preaching 'the euangle of Henry Nicholas and Jacob Behmen'.[81] Fowler was certainly correct about Pordage's admiration for Boehme; was he also right about his interest in Niclaes? The word 'Familism' was a generalised term of abuse, and the most thorough student of English Familism has rightly warned against taking seventeenth-century references to the Family of Love too literally.[82] Nigel Smith has pointed out, however, that Behmenist and Familist symbols are blended in the frontispiece of at least one copy of Samuel Pordage's *Mundorum explicatio*.[83] The eighteenth-century Moravian Behmenist, Francis Okeley, was an avowed admirer of the Familist schismatic, Hiël, writing a short commendatory eassay on him.[84] Christopher Marsh has pondered the apparent reluctance of English Familists to follow their continental humanist brethren into the Hiël schism, suggesting that this may reflect a failure of historians to look for Familism 'in English manor houses'.[85] Perhaps when we do look we shall find them, possibly among the Behmenists.

Whether or not there is an historical continuity between the Familists and the Behmenists, there was something of a morphological identity. It is not entirely clear how far the Family of Love itself belongs to a genuinely radical tradition. Discounting the testimony of the heresy-hunters, much of our evidence is to be

[78] Jan van Dorsten, 'Garter knights and Familists', *Journal of European Studies*, 4, 2 (1974), pp. 178–88.

[79] Pordage was also in contact with the Hartlib–Dury circle while in Holland; G.H. Turnbull, *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius. Gleanings from Hartlib's papers* (London, 1947), p. 220.

[80] John Etherington, *A brief discovery of the blasphemous doctrine of Familisme* (London, 1645), p. 10.

[81] John Tickell, *The bottomless pit smoaking in Familisme* (Oxford, 1651), sig. A6^{v}, in the preface to 'Animadversions on Mr. Copps sermon at Burford', following the main text; Christopher Fowler, *Daemonium meridianum. Satan at noon*, 2 parts (London, 1655), part 2, p. 36.

[82] Christopher W. Marsh, *The Family of Love in English society, 1550–1630* (Cambridge, 1994), ch. 9.

[83] Nigel Smith, *Perfection proclaimed. Language and literature in English radical religion, 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1989), p. 148, note.

[84] Appended to Frankenberg, *Memoirs*, pp. 144–53.

[85] Marsh, *The Family of Love*, p. 29.